

PROVIDING COMMUNITY BASED CARE AND SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Lessons learned from work with community based forums in Free State and Limpopo Provinces, September 2012

BACKGROUND

In South Africa, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has debilitated families and communities and exacerbated the effects of poverty by leaving an unprecedented number of children orphaned and vulnerable. In South Africa 5.2 million people are living with AIDS and there are over 2 million orphans and 40 000 children infected each year.¹ As a result children are growing up without adult protection, guidance, care, support, nurturing, or financial support.

In 2003, Save the Children partnered with government in Thabo Mofutsanyana District in the Free State to develop a programme responding to the needs of these vulnerable children. In line with government strategies which included the National Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Children made Vulnerable by HIV and AIDS in South Africa, spearheaded by the National Action Committee for Children Affected by AIDS (NACCA) within the Department of Social Development, The Child Responsive Integrated Project sought to realise the rights of vulnerable children by working with community groups called Child Care Forums (CCFs) to provide comprehensive and compassionate care.

WHAT IS A CHILD CARE FORUM?

Child Care Forums are comprised of community members who receive training and support from Save the Children to:

1. Identify vulnerable children within their community and monitor their well being;
2. Ensure vulnerable children and their caregivers access government and other services; and
3. Mobilise community support for vulnerable children and their caregivers.

The Child Care Forums were established to operate as the



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link between the government response to the AIDS epidemic and the community response to caring for children without appropriate care. The intention of the programme was to create a community-level system that can rapidly identify vulnerable children across a whole municipality and mobilise community, civil society, private sector and government support to provide quality and comprehensive care for these children.

APPROACH

The process of establishing Child Care Forums

Save the Children starts engaging a community by raising awareness for the need to respond to the plight of vulnerable children. It then helps ward-based communities to identify 5 to 10 volunteers to establish a Child Care Forum within the local community.

What do Child Care Forums do?

Child Care Forums identify vulnerable children through general observation, visits to houses, and referrals from community members such as teachers, ward councillors and police officers. During the identification stage, an initial assessment is made of the child and the household to determine the specific vulnerabilities of that child and his or her household. Vulnerable children and households are then registered onto a computerised community-level database, used for monitor-

1. HIV and AIDS in South Africa Fact Sheet. Department of Social Development. www.dsd.gov.za





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ing and reporting purposes. This process is also used to determine which services the child should be receiving. Child Care Forums help children and caregivers to access services, by referring them to clinics, local and provincial government offices (principally Municipality offices and the Departments of Home Affairs and Social Development), government social workers, schools and ECD centres, and the South African Police Services, as well as to other community groups or NGOs in the area, depending on their needs. Child Care Forums also run age appropriate activities for children. Examples include facilitating after school care, distribution of toys and clothing to young children, facilitating play groups, providing information and encouragement to children, facilitating play and sports, assisting with homework and teaching life skills such as sewing and cooking. Child Care Forums are also working with caregivers to teach them about the minimum standards of care to which children are entitled, giving them advice on child care or on accessing services. Where caregivers are ill Child Care Forums would also assist caregivers with chores such as cleaning and cooking.

Forms of care and support accessed by vulnerable children through the intervention of Child Care Forums therefore include accessing grants, being linked with feeding programmes, homework assistance, receiving counselling, accessing information and advice, taking part in recreational activities, having an adult to talk to, receiving school uniforms and shoes.

How have Save the Children supported Child Care Forums?

Since 2003, Save the Children has provided different forms of training and support to Child Care Forums. Members have been trained and mentored to address a range of relevant issues including child rights, child protection, child participa-

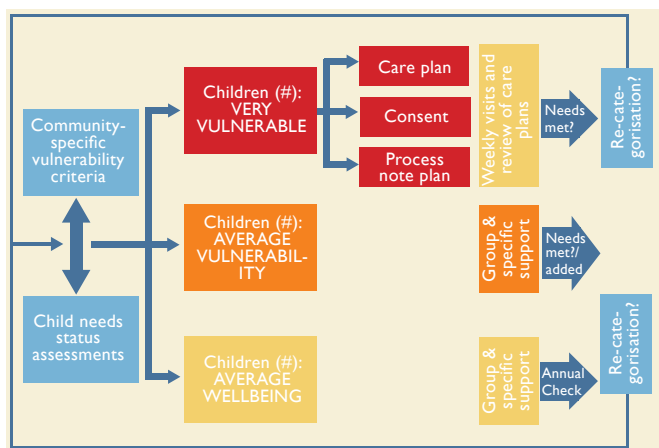
tion, establishment and management of Child Care Forums, specific skills to provide care and support to children, child development, resource mobilisation and project management. Support has also taken the form of financial input for stipends, supply of materials and equipment, linking Child Care Forums with relevant support structures or authorities, and organisational development. Communities have also been trained and supported to establish a computerised community-level database for the vulnerable households and children in the ward.

Child Care Forums alone cannot provide the quality care that is needed for vulnerable children therefore Child Care Forums are encouraged to develop links with other community organisations and groups — known as local networks of care for children. Networks of Care bring together schools, clinics, home-based care groups, faith-based organizations (FBOs), local business, the ward councillors, and the community development workers. The networks of care were designed to improve the delivery of services to children by not only co-ordinating the programmes of key partners but also providing the opportunity to share knowledge on what works.

Categorisation: the evolution of community based care and support

One of the strengths of the programme has been its ability to identify the large numbers of vulnerable children hidden in communities. Between 2008 and 2012 more than 65 000 children were consistently identified and referred by Child Care Forums on an annual basis. After some time it became a challenge to balance reaching such large numbers of vulnerable children with quality care and support. In 2011, Save the Children introduced a traffic light approach where Child

Care Forums assess and consequently categorise children according to vulnerability. Red for the most vulnerable, orange for children with average vulnerability and green for children with average wellbeing. This was done to prioritise the most vulnerable children and ensure more frequent and focused care and support to these children. The children with average vulnerability are mostly served through events targeting groups of children, whereas individual care plans are designed for very vulnerable children and followed up with more frequent home visits.



COVERAGE

Over the lifetime of the project Save the Children has supported 108 Child Care Forums in the Free State and through a partnership with a local NGO called the Centre for Positive Care (CPC), supported a further 61 Child Care Forum in Limpopo. Since 2003, more than 1,000 community caregivers were capacitated through the project. Over 110,000 vulnerable children have been identified and received support through these Forums in 12 municipalities across 4 districts.

SUCCESESSES

- A substantial number of vulnerable children with critical needs have been identified and supported through the programme.² Child Care Forums have been able to identify vulnerable children that would otherwise not have been helped.

“The community now knows and accepts the CCF through Save the Children. They [community members] used to hide children and not allow us to see or identify children. But now Save the Children has helped people understand that the vulnerable children problem is for the whole community, not just individuals. Now there are no secrets, everyone now speaks boldly about the children and what can be done.”³ – Child Care Forum member

- The categorisation process in which children receive support according to their level of vulnerability is effective in allowing targeted interventions to the most vulnerable children, while maintaining a wide reach. Children themselves reported significant short-term outcomes in that they were receiving grants (due to obtaining appropriate documentation such as birth certificates) and being better cared for. There is also better distribution of resources to the most needy. The benefits of Categorisation to the Child Care Forums included that they could focus their activities better; that success became more visible, and there was recognition by service providers and structures such as the ward counsellors.⁴
- Through the computerized community-based database, mapping of vulnerability can be done at a large scale – providing information that is relevant for government planning and response at local level⁵. The majority of Child Care Forums are managing their own data – ensuring that data is accessible to be used for making decisions, reporting to community stakeholders or monitoring progress in addressing vulnerability.
- Training, mentorship and support have enabled the establishment and functioning of a substantial Child Care Forum force.⁶
- Through close partnership with the Department of Social Development and supporting Child Care Forums to apply for funding, more than 70% of Child Care Forum structures in the Free State are currently accessing support from government, significantly enhancing the scale and sustainability of the Child Care Forums.
- By creating inter-institutional structures (such as co-ordinating structures including municipal task teams or Local Action Committees for Children Affected by AIDS (LACCAs)) and relationships (such as networks of care), the integration of Child Care Forums into the government's and communities' response have provided government and other service providers with evidence and guidance around priority service gaps and the patterns of vulnerability. Information flow and accountability mechanisms are essential, and the programme has made significant progress in the design of enabling structures.⁷

2 Impact Consulting, 2012, Outcomes evaluation of the Child care Forums on the wellbeing of children.

3 Khulisa Management Services, 2008, Case Study: Community-Based Care and Protection of Children Affected by HIV/AIDS and Poverty Programme

4 Resilience Analysis Consulting, 2012, Assessment on the effectiveness of the categorisation approach in identification and support to vulnerable children by community caregivers

5 Impact Consulting, 2012

6 Impact Consulting, 2012

7 Impact Consulting, 2012

8 Impact Consulting, 2012

LESSONS LEARNT ON THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DETERMINANTS OF IMPROVED CHILD WELLBEING FROM CHILD CARE FORUM INTERVENTIONS.⁸

- Greater frequency of contact with Child Care Forum members
- Daily attendance at after-school care groups provides excellent academic, social and child protection outcomes, while also helping to ensure effective referral, monitoring and follow-up to services
- Effective referral is a major determinant of outcomes
- Assistance in accessing enabling documents, especially birth certificates
- Economic security, especially the access to provision of food and school uniforms, are a major determinant of wellbeing

CHALLENGES

There are still a number of barriers for certain groups of vulnerable children to access services. Foreign children (especially undocumented foreign children from border towns) are often the most vulnerable as they don't have access to enabling documentation. Disabled children are another very vulnerable group hidden from view by their caregivers, making it difficult for Child Care Forums to identify and assist them.

Lack of funding and inconsistent levels of stipends paid to Child Care Forum members result in discontent and a high turnover of Child Care Forum members. Child Care Forums need government to acknowledge and support their efforts.⁹

NEXT STEPS

The categorisation approach will be further developed and supported to ensure effective use in drafting dynamic individual care plans. The approach will be shared widely as it has the potential to be replicated not only in other areas and with organisations working with children, but also in other sectors (including health).

Save the Children will continue to engage with government especially the Department of Social Development to provide the necessary support to Child Care Forums in the form of stipends, and technical assistance in different areas such as implementing useful reporting systems (computerised community-level database). Functional coordination at all levels (provincial, district and local) will continue to be promoted as it is critical to the success and sustainability of Child Care Forums.

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9. Save the Children, 2009, Child Care Forums in Action

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